

Quality, Scope, and Extent of Supported Employment Services

The Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1986 authorized a new formula grant program entitled the State Supported Employment Services Program. The Act recognizes supported employment as a legitimate vocational rehabilitation outcome. The 1998 amendments to the Rehabilitation Act maintained many of the core components of the original supported employment regulations but made the program more effective and flexible in assisting persons with the most significant disabilities to successfully obtain and maintain competitive employment in integrated work settings. Supported employment services are a central link in the rehabilitation service delivery system in South Dakota.

Supported Employment Definition

The Act as amended defines supported employment as:

Competitive work in integrated work settings, or employment in integrated work settings in which individuals are working toward competitive work, consistent with the strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice of the individuals with the most significant disabilities for whom competitive employment:

- a. has not traditionally occurred; or
- b. has been interrupted or intermittent as a result of a significant disability; and
- c. who, because of their nature and severity of their disability, need intensive supported employment services for the period, or extended services to perform such work..
- d. This also includes transitional employment for persons with the most significant disabilities due to mental illness.

Quality of Supported Employment

Ensuring that quality supported employment (SE) services are being provided to individuals with the most significant disabilities in South Dakota is a priority for the Division. Quality is measured by more than just the number of individuals who receive supported employment services. Quality also incorporates key values such as self-determinism; choice; person-centered supports; quality of life; and full inclusion.

The Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS or Division) is committed to providing quality supported employment services to individuals with disabilities. Providing training to VR counselors and supported employment service providers is essential to improving services. During the past years the following training has been provided to improve the quality of supported employment services in South Dakota:

- Vocational Rehabilitation for Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities
- Personality Disorders
- Supported Employment Conferences
- Mid Winter and Fall Conferences
- Comprehensive training sessions for employment specialists annually
- Presentations on Transition and Supported Employment
- "Managing Supported Employment Programs".
- "The Route to Community and Inclusionary Culture".
- Summer Institute - Person Centered Planning Training.
- Customizing Employment
- Employment and Benefits Training

In the RSA 2005 annual review report, the Division of Rehabilitation Services showed 32.29% of our successful closures in employment with supports in an integrated setting (supported employment consumers) while the national average was 9.07% . Supported employment programs have been developed in all of the adjustment training centers (17) and nine of eleven mental health centers in South Dakota. In addition, supported employment services are available through one school cooperative, Communication Services for the Deaf, and the South Dakota Rehabilitation Center for the Blind. These SE programs provide services through the use of individual placements, enclaves, and mobile work crews.

Timing of the Transition to Extended Services

The State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency provides time-limited services needed to support an individual in employment. Vocational Rehabilitation can fund a maximum of 18 months of job coaching and follow-along services unless the Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) indicates that more than 18 months of services are necessary for the individual to achieve job stability prior to transitioning to extended services.

Prior to the purchase of supported employment services, the need for the services, the appropriate extended services and funding, and the appropriate agency agreeing to provide the services are established and identified on the IPE. The transition to the extended services (long term funding source) occurs when 18 months of job coaching and follow along services have been provided or earlier if the following three requirements are met:

1. The individual's employment is stable;
2. The individual has met the hourly goal of employment established in the IPE; and
3. The extended services are immediate without any interruption in the provision of the ongoing services to maintain employment.

If the IPE indicates that more than 18 months of services are necessary in order for the individual to achieve job stability, the time-limited services of job coaching and follow along can exceed 18 months. After the individual has transitioned to extended employment, the individual must maintain employment for at least 90 days before the consumer's case is a successful closure.

Accomplishments in Supported Employment

The Division continues to have a very high percentage of individuals with the most significant disabilities who utilize supported employment services. The success of this program is due to the coordination of supported employment services with local providers and allowing for incentive payments for outcome based services. Restructuring the funding and delivery of situational assessments has also improved services for individuals with disabilities. Insurance is now available for the consumer while completing a situational assessment. This arrangement assists in easing employer's concerns in regard to liability during the assessments conducted at job sites.

The Division has made significant progress in developing methods to better serve individuals with severe and persistent mental illness (SPMI). Individuals with mental illness are currently the largest disability group served within the Division. All of our District Offices have a counselor who specializes in services for these individuals. In addition, performance contracts have been established with 4 mental health centers: Aberdeen MH Center, Behavior Management Systems, Southeastern Mental Health Center, and Human Service Agency. These contracts have promoted the use of supported employment services,

supported educational services, employment skills training and transitional employment. This model of contract has developed a team approach between the local VR office and the local Mental Health Center. Use of contractual agreements has led to better coordination of long-term supports and allows individuals to have greater and easier access to vocational rehabilitation services. A VR Counselor has been designated as the primary VR counselor with the mental health center however individuals can choose another VR counselor if the arrangement is approved by the District Supervisor. The Division has implemented a paid work experience program with the mental health centers who have performance based contracts, and the Department of Human Services IMPACT Program in Yankton. This program provides individuals the opportunity to try community employment in a variety of occupations. This has been successful in assisting individuals to permanent employment. The Division has also restructured the Yankton Rehabilitation Program to redirect resources to be more community based. Extensive training has been provided to the staff at the IMPACT program.